

Dementia

What is dementia?

- Dementia is a common consequence of several degenerative central nervous system diseases, especially those diseases that affect older adults
- Dementia syndromes can be divided into categories based on location of changes within the central nervous system: cortical dementias (cerebral cortex), subcortical dementias (basal ganglia, thalamus, and brain stem), and mixed dementias (both structural areas)
 - Alzheimer's Disease: cortical dementia accounting for 50-70% of all progressive dementias
 - Other dementias include, but not limited to: Vascular Dementia, Pick's Disease, Primary Progressive Aphasia, Lewy Body Dementia, Frontotemporal Dementia
- Dementia includes a long and short-term memory impairment with at least one of the following: impaired abstract thinking, personality changes, impaired judgment, impaired language, impaired visual recognition
- Individuals with dementia can learn new information and re-learn information or behaviors previously known, but forgotten
- Because the array of symptoms and progression of the disease process can vary person to person, assessment and treatment approaches will need to be highly individualized to decrease demands on most impaired skills and capitalize on the spared skills

How do we evaluate dementia?

- Thorough case history obtained, including pertinent medical information, family history, current medications, and informal observations of a variety of communication situations provided by family/caregivers
- Many rating scales exist to provide quick insight into communication, intellectual abilities, and competence in activities of daily living
- Standardized measures for communicative and cognitive abilities include: *Ross Information Processing Assessment- Geriatric Edition (RIPA-G)*, *Arizona Battery for Communication Disorders of Dementia (ABCD)*, *Boston Diagnostic Aphasia Examination (BDAE)*, *Boston Naming Test (BNT)*

How do we treat dementia?

- Treatment approaches for dementia will be dependent on the stage of the disease process

- Management of memory impairments: often treated using space-retrieval training and/or external memory aids, etc.
- Management of confusion: training in use of calendars, labels, watches, etc.
- Management of communication difficulties: adaptive strategies (asking for more time, reminder of conversational topic, etc.), circumlocution or word cueing, using scripted questions or sentences for maintaining conversational skills
- Management of troublesome behaviors

References:

Text- Introduction to Neurogenic Communication Disorders, Robert H. Brookshire, 2007